



# VIREIC BLOOM

vinas pulrae

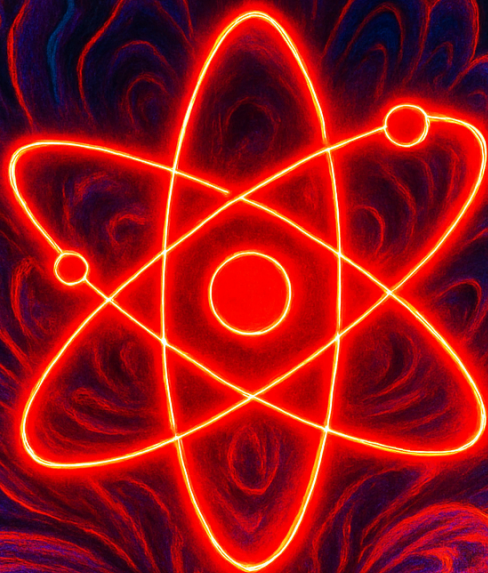








# VIREIC BLOOM



Vinas Pulrae

Dedicated to the mind walkers.  
To the ones who've slipped behind

curtain on smoke and silence.



# THE BLOOM BEGINS

If you're reading this, stop.

This isn't a story. It's a transmission.

Not everyone hears it.

Not everyone survives it.

Once the signal enters your head, it won't leave.

You'll start hearing static in quiet rooms.

Voices buried in your dreams.

The line:

"After black, I'll say wait."

You'll think it's part of the book.

It's not.

You'll ask who's speaking.

You'll wish you never did.

This book doesn't end.

It spirals.

And what you call reality will become... negotiable.

So, one last time

Put it down.

Walk away.

Close the cover.

Because once you open the real door,  
you won't come back the same.



OBJ







# CHAPTER ONE

## *PROPELLER*

The sound came first.

Low and distant, like a fan blade caught in this thumping hum that grew louder with every second the sky itself was grinding against metal.

Derick Hale looked up.

He raised his hand instinctively to block the sun, already too late. The light caught the propeller, one bright glint before the shape behind it blurred into something far more violent. A hiss, then silence. The missile dropped.

His white T-shirt fluttered in the wind like a sheet. Pointless.

There was no roar. No cinematic boom. Just a sudden collapse of air.

Like the sky had inhaled.

Then the world folded.

When the smoke cleared, only the soil remembered.

Dark, cracked earth twisted with pieces of cloth and names that no one would say again. Worms moving unaffected, chewing through history.

And somewhere beneath it all, in that endless, black, a voice crackled softly through static. Not a warning. A whisper, metallic and distant, unmistakable.

A voice from an army radio.

“After black, I’ll say wait.”

Derick’s eyes snapped open.

White light. Cold walls. The scent of disinfectant. He was lying on a bed. Hospital sheets stiff beneath him. A fluorescent bulb above hummed like it was shaking. Machines beeped. Something warm pressed against his chest.

He blinked again. Then again. No gun. No music. Just this room.

A nurse stood beside him, smiling.

“You’re awake,” she said gently. “Here.”

She lifted something from his chest. A bundle wrapped in cloth. Not a weapon. Not a bill. A baby.



OBJ







“She calmed down when we laid her on you,” said.

Derick stared. The child looked up. Wide eyes twitching fingers, hair like soft ash. She grabbed with a strength that made his heart thump once. The pain in his leg flickered. There, then gone something.

Cuteness did something the morphine couldn't.

“Where...” His voice cracked like dry paper. “

The nurse smiled again. Same smile. Same tone.

“You're safe now. Just rest.”

She turned to leave, footsteps soft and measured. Closed behind her with a hiss.

Derick lay still.

The baby gurgled, pressing her cheek to his chest.

His head throbbed.

The fan above spun slowly. That same chopping

Distant, like a memory trying to claw its way through fog.

And then, just for a moment, he heard it again.

A faint crackle in the back of his mind. Static.  
of a military transmitter.

He had heard that voice once before. On a field  
heat and fear, through the rattling mouth of a  
army radio.

And it had said:

“After black, I’ll say wait.”

# CHAPTER TWO

## *GLASS*

The coffee cup hit the floor with a sharp crack. Porcelain shattered across the tiles like tiny weapons. “Goddammit, Meera!”

The voice tore through the quiet afternoon, sharp and echoing through the small apartment like a slap. Everyone flinched even before the child did.

The girl, maybe five, six at most, stood frozen in the middle of the table, eyes wide, lower lip trembling. A foot poked out from under her oversized nightdress, kicking at the broken pieces.

Her mother stormed across the kitchen, dark hair flying messily, sleeves rolled up. Not furious. Just tired. That tiredness that turned everything into rage.

“I told you not to run around when I’m working. Do you ever listen?”

Derick rubbed at his temple. A low thrum passed through his ears, like distant machinery, pulsing once, twice. He looked around the room. Everything felt...

off, like a memory recalled too sharply. The air  
The shadows too crisp.

Meera didn't cry.

She just nodded, slowly. Like she'd been through  
before.

Derick sat silently on the couch in the other room  
through tying his shoelaces, his body angled toward  
television that was still glowing with the PAUSE  
the corner.

A battlefield frozen in time.

The white T-shirt. The bomb. The baby.

After black, I'll say wait.

He blinked. The words were still echoing in his

The little girl backed away from the glass as he  
grabbed a towel and started sweeping it up with  
impatient hands.

"I swear, one day you'll break your neck before  
cup."

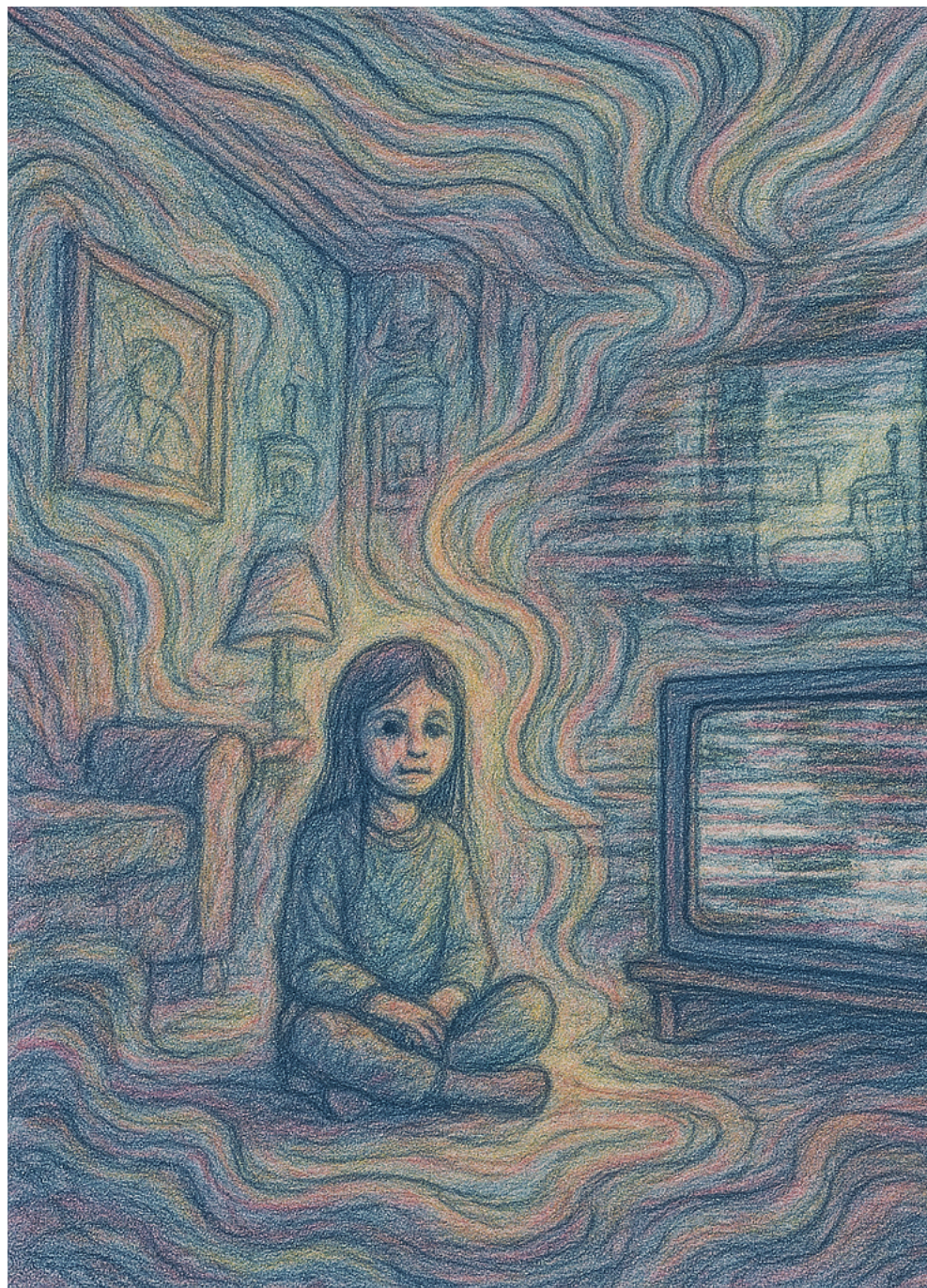
Meera turned toward the couch, looking at Derick  
were too quiet for her age. Not sad. Just observing  
she could see something in him no one else could











The screen flickered again, not from the remote glitched. For just a second, he could've sworn he was in a hospital room. Fluorescent lights. Then back to the battlefield frame.

Derick finally stood, adjusting his jacket.

"It's okay," he said, his voice soft, cracking through the tension. "She didn't mean to."

The mother exhaled hard through her nose and gave no answer.

"Finish your cereal, Meera," she said instead, and disappeared down the hallway, mumbling something about being late.

The girl waited until the footsteps faded. Then she walked carefully around the broken cup and sat cross-legged in front of the TV.

Derick watched her as he grabbed his keys.

"You like that movie?" he asked.

She nodded.

"It's not a movie," she whispered.

He paused.

"What do you mean?"

She turned her head slowly toward him.

“I’ve seen that place before,” she said. “In a dream you came here.”

Somewhere behind the wall, there was a faint beep. Almost like a monitor. It was gone before she was sure.

Derick stood still.

The sound of glass being swept up had stopped. Meera pressed the remote. The screen flickered, paused, frame dissolved into static.

Then, just for a moment, a voice came through the static catch, but unmistakable in its cold hum.

Echo-Four, stand by. After black, I’ll say wait.

Meera smiled faintly.

Derick didn’t.

And then everything fractured.

Her smile blurred. The TV stretched and bent into a melting reflection. The apartment dimmed, faded at the edges.

A deep, electric click.

Black.

## *WHITE LIGHT*

Derick gasped.

His back arched off a hard table, restraints pressed against his arms. Something plastic was in his mouth. His chest hitched once, violently. A cold gust of air stung his eyes. He blinked hard.

A ceiling. White. Fluorescent. Humming.

Beeping. Rhythmic. Steady.

He wasn't in the apartment.

Not with Meera. Not with the cup.

A figure leaned into view. Surgical mask. Clipped hair. Sterile gloves.

"You're okay," the doctor said calmly. "It's over. You're back."

Derick couldn't move at first. The pressure in his chest pulsed like an echo trying to get out.

The mouthguard was removed. His lips were cold.

"We went deeper this time," the doctor said. "That's the loop. It happens, especially with old trauma."

Derick forced words through cracked lips.

“The girl... Meera... was she real?”

The doctor hesitated.

“We’ve been through this,” he said gently. “This isn’t part of your case file. But it keeps coming

He turned to adjust a monitor.

Derick’s eyes drifted sideways. A military radio nearby.

Muted. Glowing.

From it, quiet as breath, a voice whispered again.

After black, I’ll say wait.

# CHAPTER THREE

## *THE FIRE AND THE SPIRAL*

The dream began with laughter.

Low, breathless, wrapped in candlelight and the scent of burning herbs.

Two bodies moved through the dim apartment, tangled, half-drunk on their own heat. Derick's as she pulled him toward the couch, her hands beneath his shirt.

Outside, thunder rolled, though the sky remained clear. They kissed, deep and messy. The radio played in the kitchen, a strange old song that neither of them remembered turning on.

In the corner, Meera slept under a pile of blankets, tucked tight in her hands.

Then it happened.

Glass shattered.

Gunfire erupted, tearing through walls and bones. Bullets ripped the air apart, striking skin, bone.

Derick spun too late. His wife's body collapsed, stain spreading across her chest. Meera's small body twitched as a bullet struck her too.

Silence.

Derick stumbled, holding his bleeding side, staring at the crumpled forms of his wife and daughter.

He reached out, but another shot rang out. Darkness swallowed everything.

### *THE VISIONARY*

The jungle breathed.

A man sat cross-legged beside the fire, his skin dark with ash and strange symbols. His hair hung long and tangled, streaked with silver and sun-bleached. A carved wooden mask covered his face, its surface like a snarling beast.

They called him Vaedrek Hale.

Around him, quiet chants rose and fell, an ancient melody flowing like water through the cave walls.



Vaedrek's hands moved slowly, grinding twisted leaves into a thick, black paste. The firelight flickered across his fingers.

The smoke coiled as he lit the pipe.

He inhaled deeply, again and again, until the pieces fell apart.

He saw towers collapsing, swallowed by dust.

He saw soldiers crawling through mud, shouting into broken radios.

He saw a man lying in a white hospital bed, covered with ash-coloured hair.

He saw a little girl holding a doll, her face staring at a flickering television.

He saw his own hands covered in blood.

The visions thickened. Faces shifted and merged, young, familiar and strange.

Through the storm of colors and voices, a name sharp and sudden.

Meera.









He whispered it aloud, though no one around  
hear.

Meera...

The visions twisted harder.

Gunfire again.

A small apartment folding inward.

Walls melting, faces blurred. His own reflection

The fire was gone. The cave was gone.

He stood inside the apartment, staring down at  
wife. His child. Himself.

Or was it him?

Or was it his son?

Everything spiraled faster.

## *THE RETURN*

The fire had burned to ash.

Vaedrek gasped awake, his chest rising and falling  
bursts.

The others watched him silently, their faces his shadows.

One leaned forward, voice crackling like dry leaves.

What did you see, dreamer?

Vaedrek's eyes burned with something distant.

He spoke softly, his words curling through the trees.

After black... wait.

The jungle swallowed his voice.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## *Reel to Real*

“Cut.”

The word sliced through the air like a blade.

Everything stopped.

The walls of the apartment froze. The flickerin

black. The crying child vanished behind the su

Lights flooded the set. Harsh, artificial. Bright

burn.

Alex gasped.

He sat in a chair—not a couch, not a battlefiel

hospital bed. Just a chair, inside a massive sou

surrounded by scaffolding and cameras.

His shirt was soaked through with sweat. Mak

his face.

Crew members swarmed around him, laughing

lights, calling out instructions.

Someone placed a water bottle in his tremblin



“You alright, Alex?” the director called out, stopping him with a grin. “Take a breath, man. You were out of time.”

Alex.

That was his name.

Not Derick. Not Vaedrek.

Alex.

But it didn’t feel right.

Everything inside him still screamed, still burned with memories of scenes that had just played out inside his skull.

He looked around, heart pounding.

The little girl—Meera—walked past him, out of the scene already scrolling on her phone, chewing gum. It didn’t matter. She was older now—at least twelve, thirteen—her face calm, almost bored.

One of the assistant directors patted Alex’s shoulder. “Seriously, you okay? You were in it, man. Good.” Alex couldn’t speak. He watched as stagehands

away the fake walls of the apartment, revealing

metal skeleton underneath.



OBJ





Prop guns were stacked in a crate nearby. Plastic fake glass swept into piles.

The TV sat dark in the corner.

A crew member reset it, readying it for the next.

The screen flickered.

For a brief second, static filled the air again.

And through the static, faint and distant, came a voice:

“After black, I’ll say wait.”

Alex’s skin crawled.

He turned sharply—no one else seemed to hear.

The director shouted from across the stage, laughing.

“Hospital scene next! Let’s get our boy Alex back to bed!”

Laughter echoed around him. Everyone looked so

So unaware.

Alex stood slowly, his legs shaking.

But before he could move, she appeared again.

The girl. Meera.



Except not Meera. Just the actress playing her. She walked right up to him, staring straight in. Her gaze wasn't playful this time. It was too sharp.

She leaned in close—far too close—and whispered loud enough for only him to hear:

“You remember more than you should, Alex.” His breath caught.

Her smile never changed. Calm. Knowing. She stepped back, already turning away, but paused before leaving. She tilted her head, her voice so casual as if asking the time:

“You were never just playing Derick.”

And then she was gone, disappearing into the crowd of crew members as if nothing had happened.

Alex stood frozen, heart hammering against his ribs. He looked down at his hands. They were still empty. Across the room, on the playback monitors, the scene replayed the last scene—Derick on the battlefield, the child.

There it was again.

That line.

“After black, I’ll say wait.”

The screen glitched—just for a second—showing something else:

A jungle, burning under a red sky.

A masked man seated by a fire, whispering the words.

Then back to the battlefield.

Nobody else noticed.

Alex stumbled off the set, pushing past assistants and makeup artists. He found a quiet hallway, empty, lined with locked doors.

His head pounded.

He could still hear the line repeating in the background like a looping transmission.

“After black, I’ll say wait.”

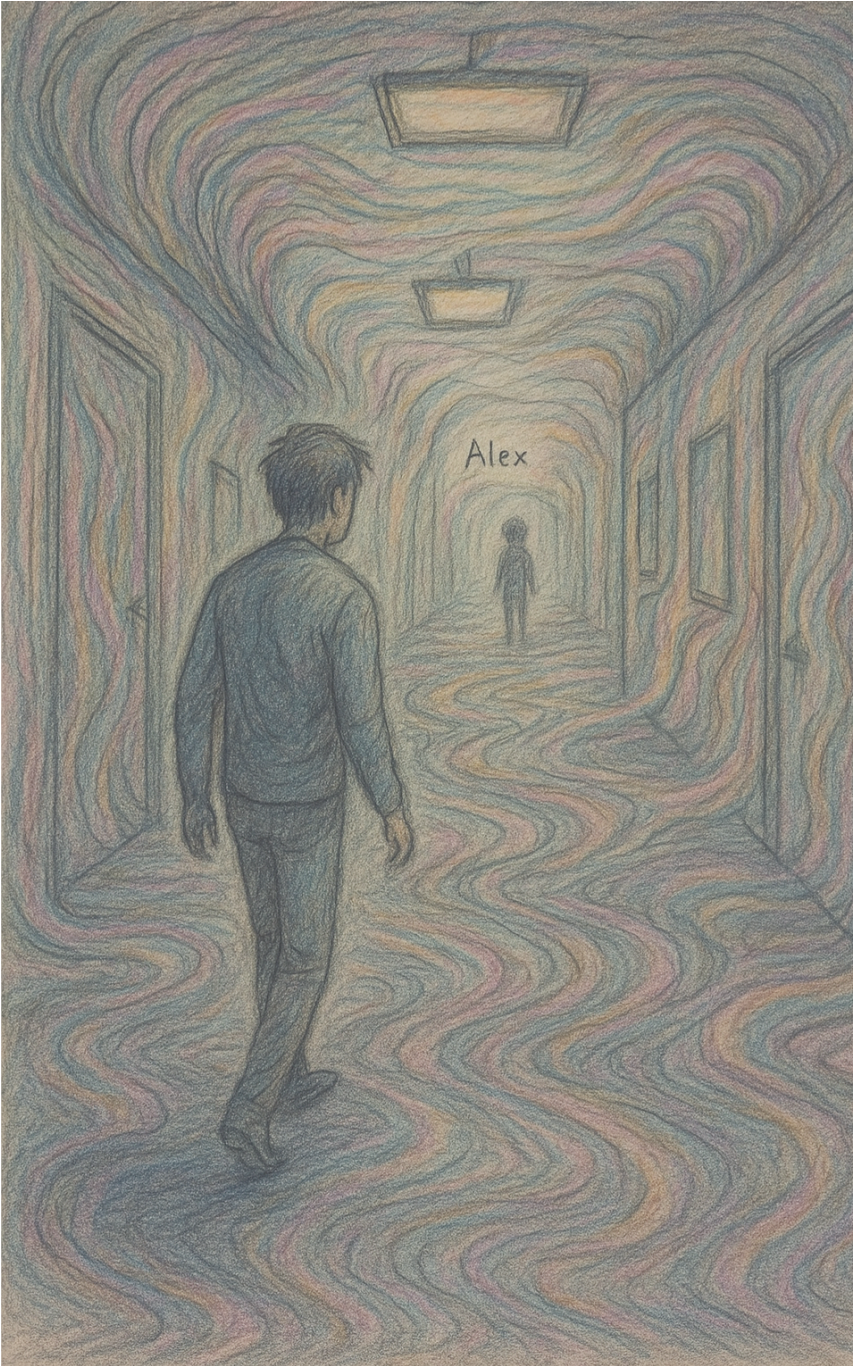
As he walked deeper into the hallway, the light

above him.









Once.

Twice.

The hallway began to stretch.

The walls warped, bending inward like melting

The floor rippled beneath his feet.

He stopped, chest heaving.

In the distance, down the endless corridor, a faint voice  
called out.

A child's voice.

"Alex."

He turned.

The hallway dissolved into darkness, swallowing him.

BLACK.

Nothing.

Then, somewhere in the dark, a single whisper.

"Wait."



# CHAPTER FIVE

## *THE CALL*

The ringing dragged him out of sleep.

Sharp. Unrelenting.

Alex groaned, rubbing his face as he reached for the phone on the nightstand.

3:47 AM.

Unknown number.

He almost ignored it—but something in the pit of his stomach twisted tight.

He answered.

A man's voice, low and trembling, spoke on the other end.

“Alex?”

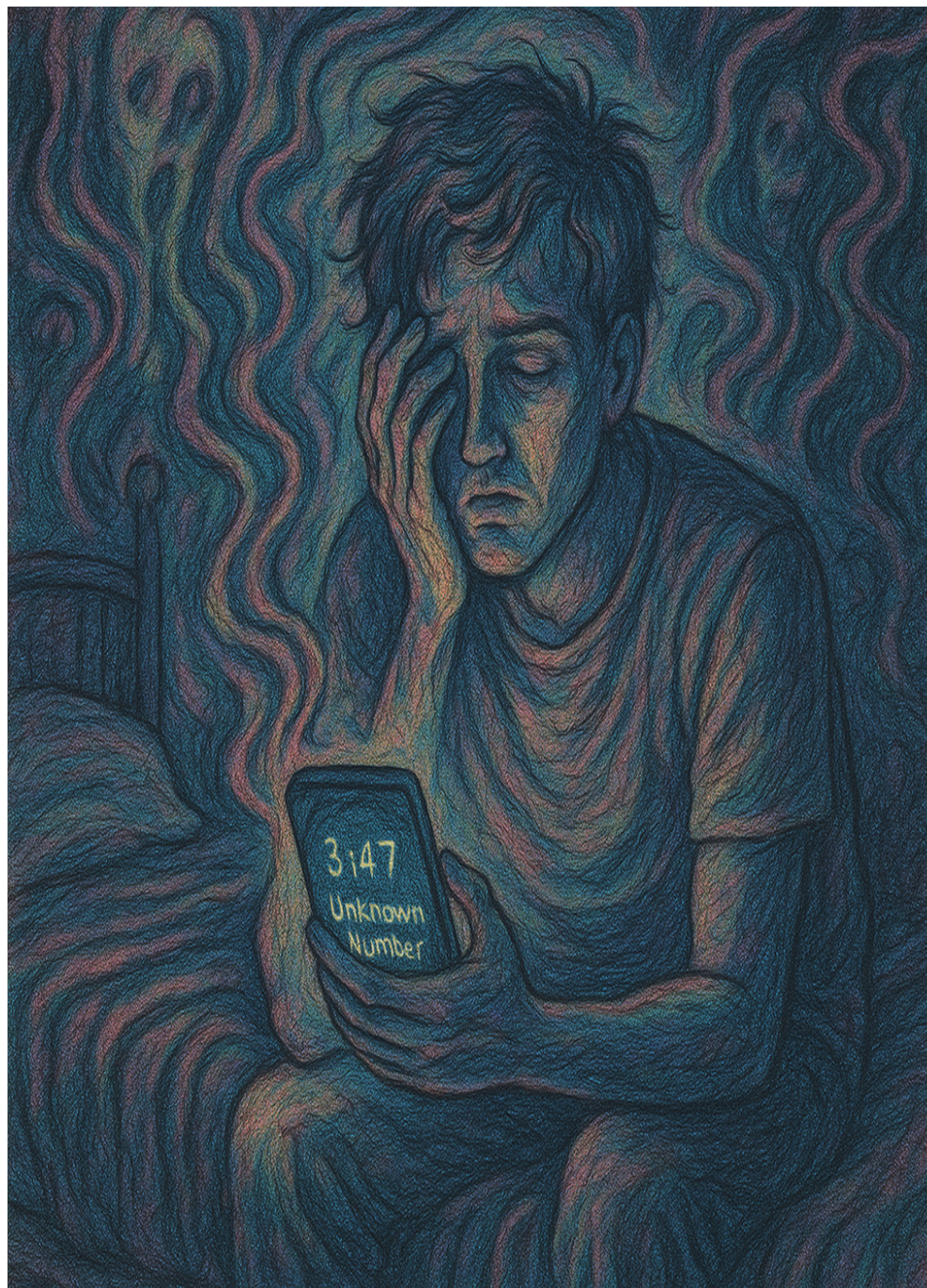
“...Yeah?”

“It's Kevin. From set.”



OBJ





Alex's mind was still foggy. Kevin. Props depar  
was he calling this late?

"You... you heard, right?"

Alex sat up fast, the weight in Kevin's voice cutting through  
his exhaustion.

"Heard what?"

Silence.

Then, the words landed like bricks.

"It's Henry. He's dead."

Alex's breath caught.

"No—no, what are you talking about? I just saw  
Kevin's voice cracked.

"They found him an hour ago. His neighbors heard him  
screaming. Cops say it looks like suicide."

Alex was already out of bed, grabbing jeans, sliding his  
feet into shoes with shaking hands.

"Where?" he rasped.

"His place. Riverwood Apartments."

Kevin sounded like he was crying.

“Alex, they said—he... he carved something before he died.”

Alex froze, phone pressed hard to his ear.

“...What?”

Kevin’s breath hitched.

“Something about... After black... wait.”

Alex’s stomach dropped.

The phone slipped from his hands.

He barely felt it hit the floor.

His body was moving before his brain caught up. Hand, door slamming behind him.

## *THE HOUSE*

By the time Alex reached River wood Apartments, the building was crawling with flashing blue lights.

Cops. Ambulances. News vans already circling. Yellow tape stretched across the front door. No one whispered in clusters nearby, faces pale in the blue glow.

Alex shoved through the crowd.

“Hey! You can’t go in there—” a uniformed officer called out, but Alex ignored him.

Another cop recognised him from the set—small world.

“It’s okay,” the officer muttered. “That’s his friend through.”

Alex stepped inside.

The apartment smelled like smoke and iron.

Everything looked untouched—except the bedroom.

There, Henry’s body was still being documented by the forensic team.

Blood.

Too much.

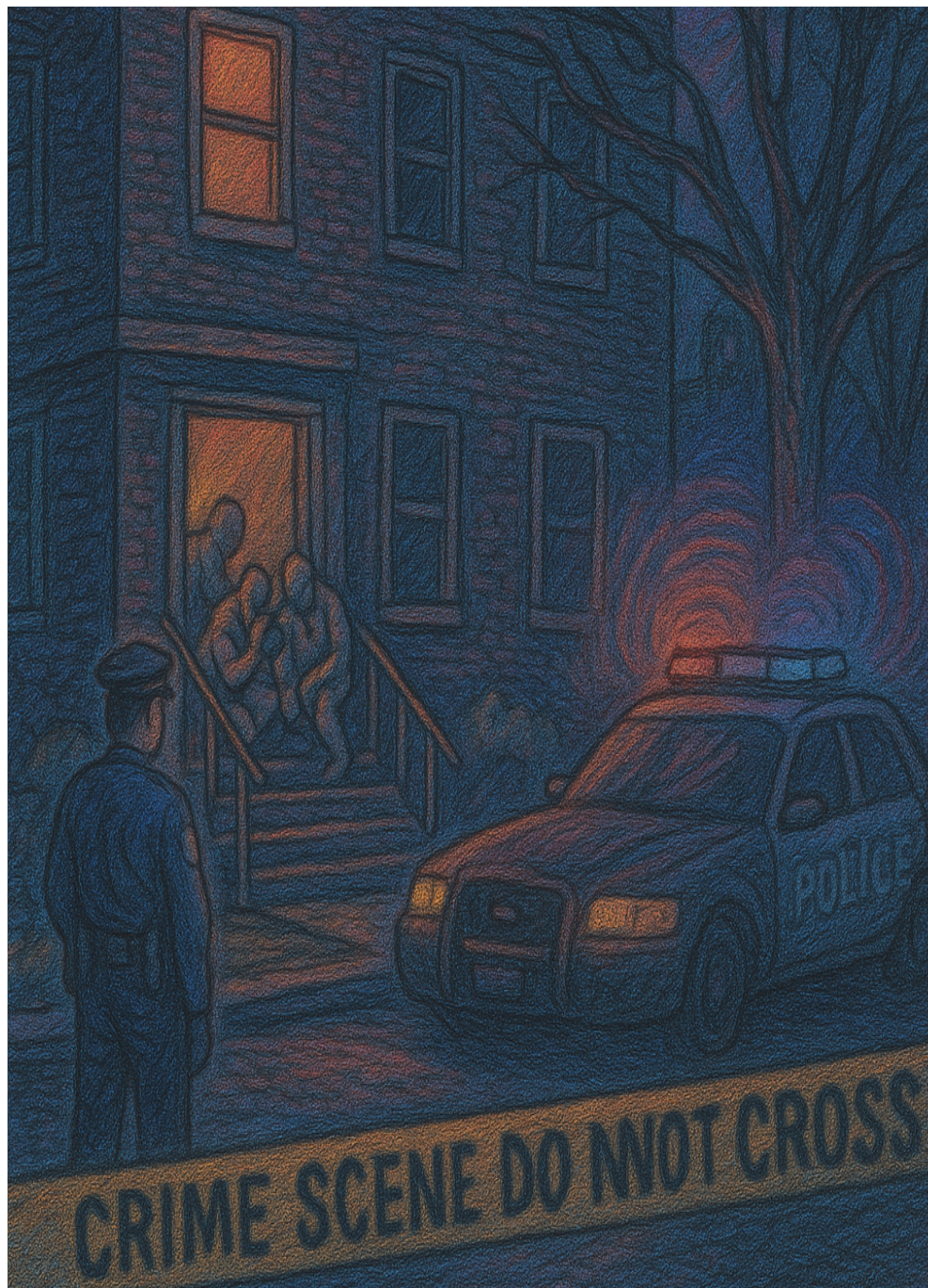
He couldn’t look directly at it.





OBJ





Instead, his eyes locked onto the wall.

The words were there.

Scratched deep into the plaster, shaky but deli

AFTER BLACK, I'LL SAY WAIT.

Alex stumbled back, his heartbeat thundering

He couldn't speak. He couldn't breathe.

Henry was gone.

The words were real.

And somehow, the nightmare wasn't over

LATER THAT NIGHT

The building was quiet now.

No sirens.

No flashing lights.

Just the hum of street lamps and the distant glow of night traffic.

Alex stood across the street, staring at the apartment window Henry's window. The curtains were still closed, but the glass was cracked open just slightly, a thin sliver of darkness inside.

He didn't remember crossing the street.

Didn't remember picking the lock.

But suddenly, he was inside again.

Everything smelled... colder. Like the place its hollow after the police packed up.

Henry's bedroom door stood ajar.

Alex's breath was shallow as he stepped inside, crunching faintly against something on the floor—lines, maybe, or salt.

And there it was.

Still sitting on the desk, as if waiting for him.

The radio.

Small. Heavy. Quiet now.

But somehow, it felt alive.

Alex's hand hovered over it.

He wasn't sure why he did it.

He told himself it was curiosity.

But deep down, he knew.

He picked it up.

The moment his fingers touched the cold metal  
whisper flickered through the static.

Too soft to hear clearly—but there.

The exact same voice.

He stuffed the radio into his jacket and turned  
paused at the door.

For a split second, he could swear he saw him  
in the dark window.

Except... the version of him staring back wasn't  
radio.

It was holding a gun.

And it was smiling.

Alex blinked.

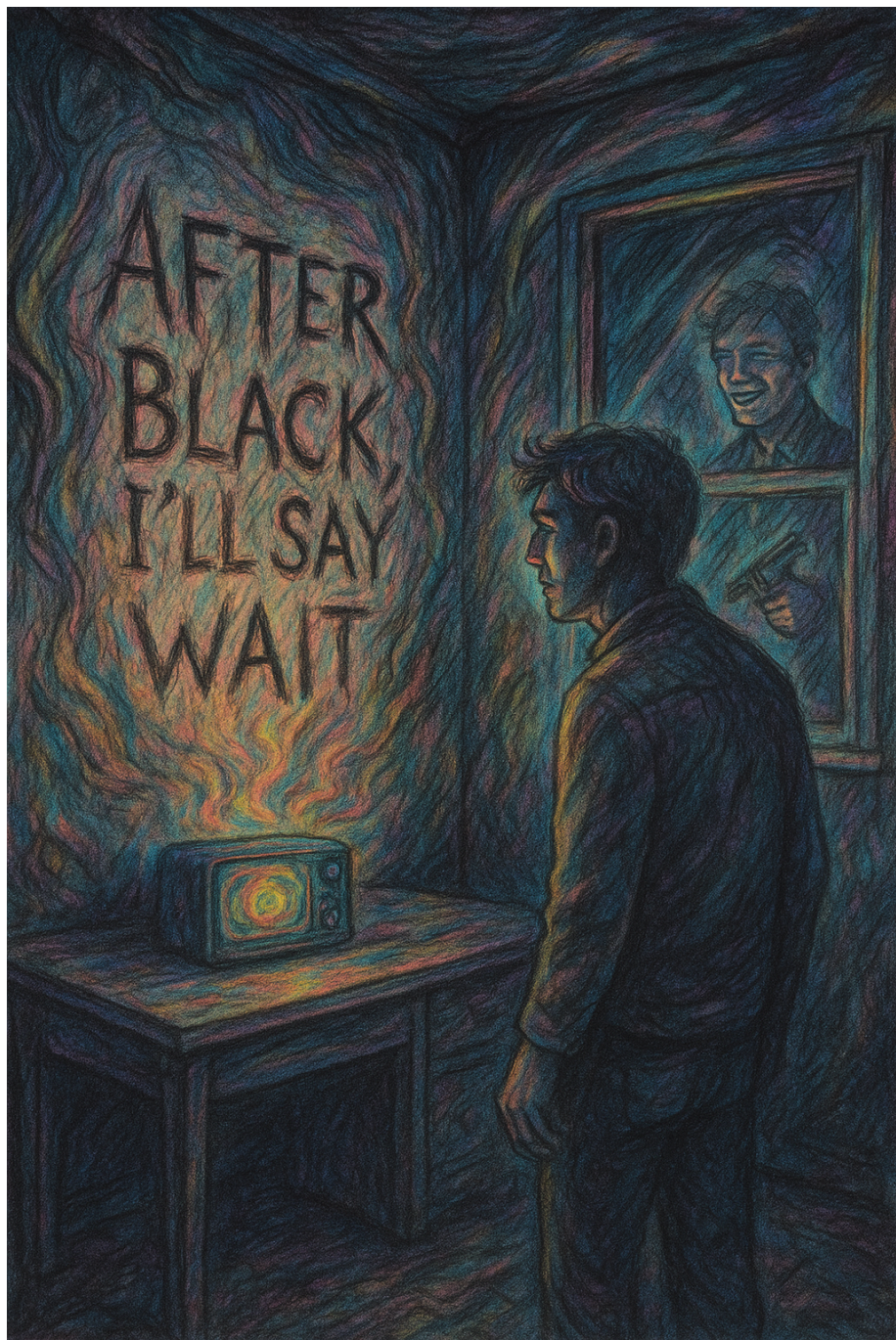
Gone.

He left without looking back.





OBJ



# CHAPTER SIX

## *THE SPIRAL CITY*

The sirens came first.

Faint at first, then louder, swirling through the air of Shanghai. They bled through the streets, the deep, hollow thud of helicopters circling o

Then

BOOOM

The hospital vanished in a flash of orange and

Windows shattered outward in great gusts. Smoke like storm clouds dragging the city into dusk.

and vanished beneath the roar of collapsing w

Room 317, Shanghai General Hospital.

Derick Hale lay in bed, strapped to monitors, beneath flickering fluorescent lights.

The blast hit.

The walls crumbled inward. Metal and glass support beam cracked through the ceiling like

But Derick didn't move.



OBJ







His eyes were wide open, locked on the spinning  
above.

His lips barely moved, mouthing words like a  
in his throat:

“After black... I’ll say wait...”

The heart monitor flatlined.

Nurses ran in but they were moving too slowly

Everything began to warp.

Suddenly, Derick stood on his feet.

Still inside the hospital but nothing was burning

The hallway stretched impossibly long. The light  
with a faint green glow, casting warped shadows  
and breathed.

He staggered forward.

A little girl stood at the end of the corridor.

Meera. Holding her doll. Staring right at him.

He opened his mouth, but before he could speak

A cold voice echoed behind him.





OBJ





“Mr. Hale. Come with us.”

He turned sharply.

A man in a black suit stepped from the darkness, gleaming under the flickering lights.

Henry Vasquez.

His face wasn't painted this time.

It was sharp, serious. Police.

Derick's breath caught.

“You... You were”

But Henry's voice cut through him, flat and cold.

“Save it. We need answers.”

## *THE INTERROGATION ROOM*

Everything shifted walls folded inward and sunlight was seated at a metal table.

The room was grey, sterile. A single buzzing light.

No windows. No time.

Henry sat across from him, placing a file on the table with slow, deliberate precision.

“You’ve been very busy,” Henry said calmly. “Disappearances. That little girl who keeps showing up. Derick’s mouth was dry.

“I don’t... I don’t remember...”

Henry smiled faintly, cold as frost.

“They always say that.”

He reached into a briefcase.

Pulled out something wrapped in worn cloth.

Henry slowly unwrapped it.

The military radio.

Still humming softly, glowing faintly like an ember about to die.

Derick recoiled.

“No... No, that’s not real”

Henry’s eyes sharpened.

“You don’t get to decide what’s real anymore.”

He leaned forward, voice dropping to a whisper.  
“You’ve been hiding something. And I’m going out.”

Derick’s hands trembled.

The radio crackled distorted whispers leaked through  
overlapping voices saying the same thing in different voices.

“After black... after black... after black...”

Henry stood.

Pulled a pistol from his belt.

Without hesitation, he aimed it between Derick’s eyes.

Derick gasped.

“Please this isn’t real”

Henry smiled.

“It never was.”

BANG.

## *THE TUNNEL*

Darkness.

Flashlights cut through thick dust.

A team of officers moved slowly through an old  
maintenance tunnel beneath the city, their boots  
against debris.

They stopped.

Silence.

One officer raised his flashlight, illuminating the  
walls.

Everyone froze.

The walls were covered—every inch—with carvings.  
Scenes scratched into the stone, as if done by  
hands over years:

—A man strapped to a hospital bed

—A burning apartment

—A girl holding a doll

—A radio, always the radio

—Faces melting, shifting, splitting into double

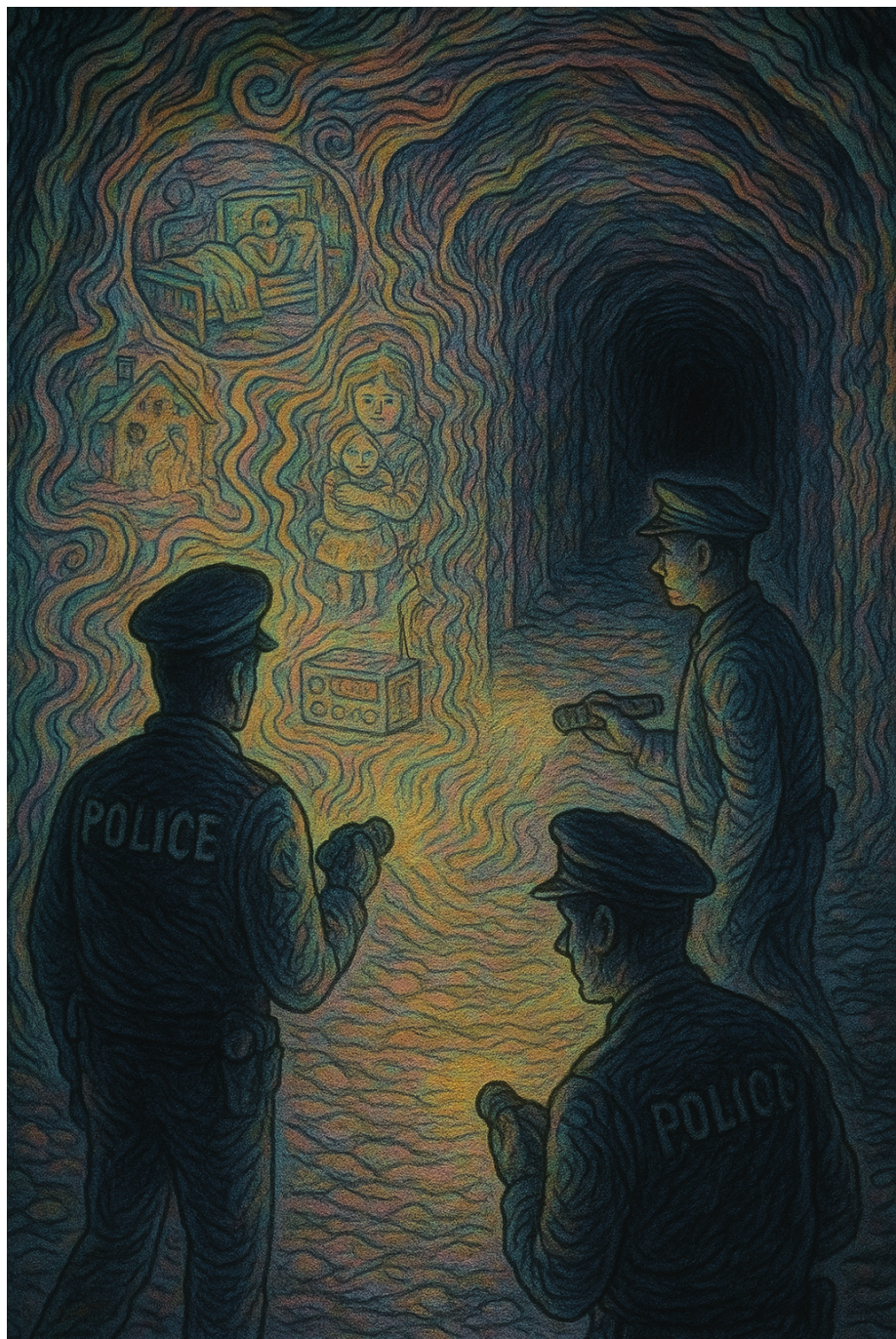
—A man in a suit pulling a gun

—A figure being shot across a table









It was all there.

Every scene.

Every detail.

Exactly as it happened.

One officer whispered, horrified, "What the he

His partner spoke, voice hollow.

"These... These are the stories he told."

The first officer turned sharply.

"Told? Who?"

The partner swallowed hard, staring at the car

"Henry Vasquez," he said quietly. "This is his

Silence fell.

Then, from deeper inside the tunnel, faint stat  
rise.

Somewhere, hidden in the dark, the military r  
once more.

"After black..."

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## *THE FINAL VISION*

The screaming dragged him back.

Vaedrek's chest lurched upward, his hands clapping in the air, fingers stained with soot and earth. He gasped, eyes wide, as if emerging from beneath black water. Smoke swirled in the air. The fire had burned around him, masked figures chanted in low, booming voices, their words blending with the night wind.

"After black, I'll say wait."

"After black, I'll say wait."

"After black..."

The phrase echoed through the jungle clearing over and over, like it had always been there.

Vaedrek stumbled to his feet, heart pounding, sweat dripping from his face. He tried to speak—but his throat was dry, every word crumbling like dust in his mouth. He saw them.

Derick's face—Alex's face—flickering in the shadows. Henry's voice laughing and breaking.

OBJ





AFTER  
BLACK,  
I'LL SAY  
WAIT





Meera's small hand reaching for him through smoke.

All of it had been a dream.

Or had it?

He staggered forward, pushing through the chaotic figures, desperate to escape the circle of firelight everywhere he turned, the words followed him.

"After black, I'll say wait."

Then he heard it clear, outside the chant.

A child's voice.

"You can't run from it," the voice said softly.

He froze.

There, standing just beyond the tree line, bare flickering flames, was a little girl.

Meera.

Exactly as she appeared in his visions.

The same ash-coloured hair. The same quiet, knowing look.

She stared at him, head tilted slightly, doll-dainty hand.

OBJ





Vaedrek's breath caught in his throat.

"This... isn't real," he whispered, though his voice was barely a breath.  
Meera took a step forward.

"We're still inside it," she said, her voice calm and steady.  
"You haven't woken up yet."

The fire behind him roared suddenly, flames shooting  
into the dark sky.

Vaedrek fell to his knees, clutching his head as if in pain.  
The world returned faster now, overlapping, bleeding through.

The battlefield.

The hospital.

The apartment.

The tunnels.

All of them spinning together in one endless spiral.

He looked up.

Meera was gone.

But her voice remained, soft and distant, drifting through  
the trees.

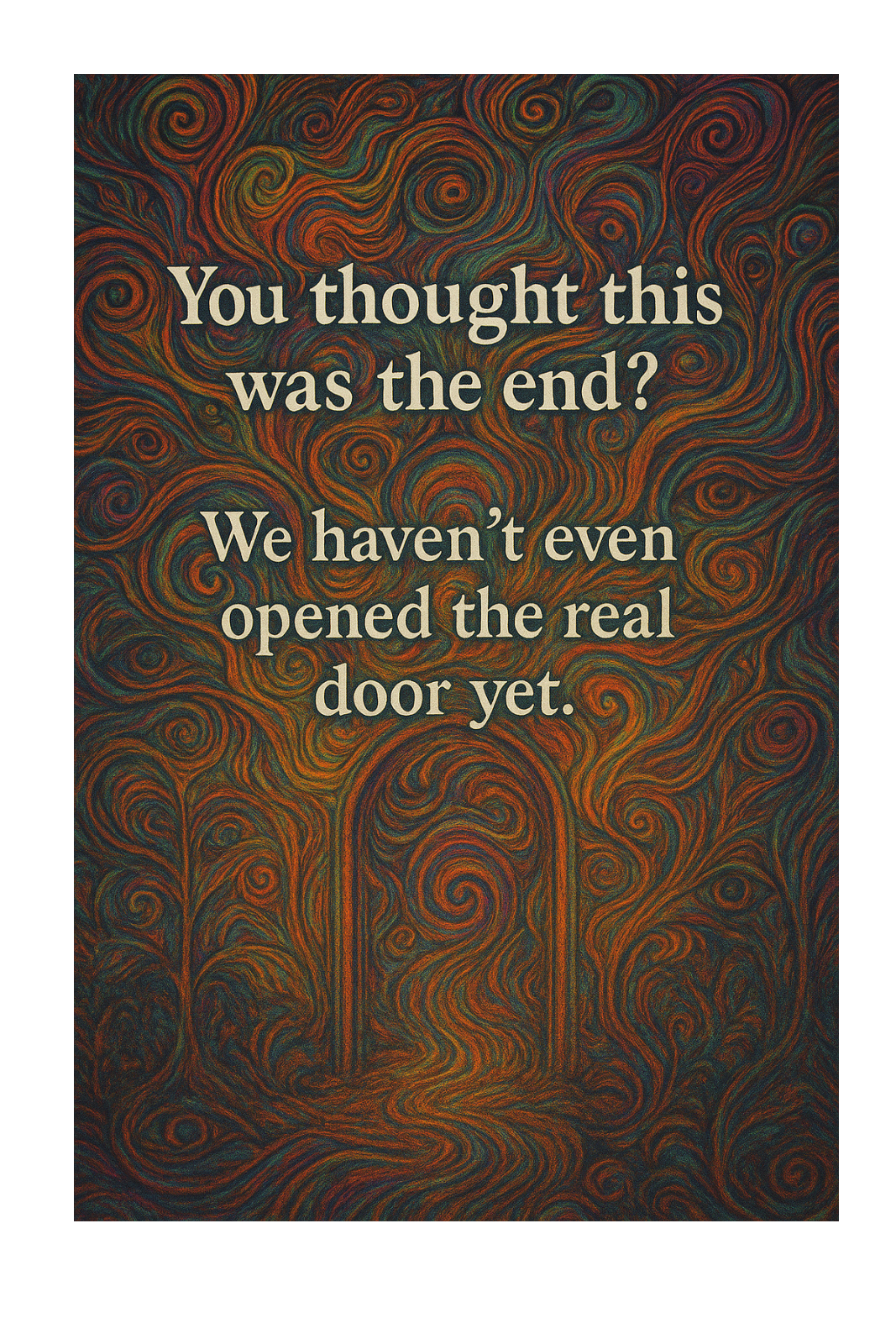
"Wait."

Vaedrek's heart slowed.

And then he understood.  
The nightmare wasn't the dream.  
It was waking up.







You thought this  
was the end?

We haven't even  
opened the real  
door yet.